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THE STATUS OF THE PROFESSOR

THAT the American college president fulfils a function and exercises a degree of power that has no parallel in the institutions of learning of the old world has been asserted so often and, so far as we know, has met with so little contradiction, that it is pleasing to find two leading representatives of the college presidency not so much justifying this peculiarity, but rather denying its existence. In the *Popular Science Monthly* for March the editor, in an article under the title "About Dismissing Professors," quotes a comment of President Butler's upon the following remark made in this paper some months ago, in reference to the plans of Reed College, the promising new institution about to be established in Oregon:

There is a fine opening for a new institution to show what a college can be wherein the personal domination by the president is abandoned, and in its stead we have a company of gentlemen and scholars working together with the president simply as the efficient center of inspiration and cooperation.

"The condition described in the last four lines," says President Butler, "is precisely what is to be found at every American college and university that is worthy of the name, and no evidence to the contrary has ever been produced by anybody."

The other utterance to which we have reference is the address delivered by President Van Hise at the recent meeting of the Association of American Universities at Charlottesville, which appears in *SCIENCE* for February 17. Doctor Van Hise makes out a very good case for the necessity of the presidential functions, a not inconsiderable part of which case consists in pointing out the extent to which, in many of our colleges and universities, those functions, so far as appointment and promotion are concerned, are exercised only in cooperation with the faculty. If anybody was under the impression that the American college president exercised his powers in the spirit of an oriental monarch habitually putting this man up and that man down, as suited his pleasure or whim, certainly the facts

stated by Doctor Van Hise must show him that he was in error.

The fact remains, however, that in our American colleges the president is not "*simply* the efficient center of inspiration and cooperation," but is in large measure thought of, and thinks of himself, as the master, or the foreman, or the captain, of a body of men working under his direction; and this fact has a potent influence on the whole character and spirit of academic life in America. The idea of administration, of coordination, of "harmony," plays a part in most of our colleges and universities altogether disproportionate to its value. Nor is the objection to this state of things merely negative. There is positive harm of the most serious kind in that submergence of self-assertive personality on the part of the professors which inevitably goes with it. It is not an accident that President Van Hise habitually speaks of "the instructional force of the university"; he instinctively thinks of the professors not as an assemblage of individuals, each expected primarily to do his own work in his own way, but as a "force" of employees jointly engaged in the production of a certain output. Nor is it easy to imagine a man who regards himself as "simply the efficient center of inspiration and cooperation" of the faculty using this language, which appears in an editorial article in the *Educational Review*:

Truly the academic animal is a queer beast. If he can not have something at which to growl and snarl, he will growl and snarl at nothing at all.

Whether or not a bill of particulars could be made out, such as would satisfy a judge and jury, in support of the proposition that the presidents of most American colleges dominate them in the way that is generally asserted, we can not undertake to say. Evidences of a less definite nature, but to our mind quite convincing, are sufficiently abundant. We do not say that it is personally the fault of the presidents; it may be quite as much the fault of the professors, or the fault of something in the national make-up. It may in part be due to the same traits of national character which result in the extraordinary power of the political

boss and in the amazing concentration of financial and industrial control in the hands of a few men. But that no need of our university world is keener than the need of an increase in the personal importance, dignity and self-assertion of the professor, we are profoundly convinced. And it is encouraging to note that on every hand when the issue arises sentiment is strongly manifested on the right side. The dismissal of Professor Ross from Leland Stanford found nowhere stronger condemnation than among men thoroughly out of sympathy with his economic views, but deeply conscious of the importance of professorial independence. The report recently made to the Carnegie Foundation by a mechanical engineer was at once recognized everywhere as a *reductio ad absurdum* of the idea that colleges and universities should be conducted on machine-shop principles. The attempt to get the maximum of efficiency at every point by the exercise of supervision and control, even when not carried to that ridiculous extreme, is destructive of that vitality upon which the true efficiency of a university depends, and which resides in the inherent personal qualities of its professors. It is the permanence of tenure of professors, the undisputed dignity and honor of their position, that have made the great universities of the old world what they are. And no substitute for the vitalizing influence of these essential elements can be provided by any amount of supervisory meddling or administrative perfection.—New York *Evening Post*.

SCIENTIFIC BOOKS

Conduction of Electricity through Gases and Radioactivity. By R. K. McCLUNG. Philadelphia, P. Blakiston's Son & Co. Pp. xiv + 245.

Among the many books which have appeared upon this subject within the past five years this is the first which attempts to present a definite course of instruction "suitable for the less advanced student or undergraduate." The feature which differentiates it most markedly from other books and which gives it its great importance is the presentation of de-

tailed directions for 125 laboratory experiments. The book is in fact built up about these experiments and any student who performs them all can scarcely fail to gain a fundamental grasp of the principles of gaseous conduction and radioactivity.

It may perhaps be questioned whether many undergraduates will be found who will have either time or ability to perform satisfactorily all of the experiments outlined—in fact, I confess to a suspicion that perhaps no one person has ever performed all of them, for I should estimate that that would be a task requiring four or five years of continuous work by a well-trained experimenter. Nevertheless, the book is a great boon for the student who is just beginning research in this field as well as for the instructor who is directing it, for it collects in compact, accessible form a multitude of practical points which are essential to successful experimenting, but which each individual experimenter has heretofore had to "dig out" for himself or else to obtain from some more experienced person by the laborious process of individual oral instruction.

The one danger which will have to be guarded against is that the student by virtue of being crowded too rapidly over the experimental ground covered by practically all of the important researches in this field of the past fifteen years does not develop the habit of very superficial experimenting. The book meets an important need and will doubtless receive wide use.

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Die Ernährung der Wassertiere und der Stoffhaushalt der Gewässer. Von AUGUST PÜTTER. Jena, Gustav Fischer. 1909. Pp. 168. Price M. 5.0.

Dr. Pütter's researches on the food of aquatic animals have called attention to a source of supply which had been almost or quite disregarded. Some of the views expressed in his earlier papers met with more or less criticism because the results obtained by other investigators were not always in accord